

**“Confronting Recidivism: Prisoner Re-entry Programs and a Just Future for All Americans.”**

**Felix Mata, Project Manager for Baltimore’s Citywide Ex-offender Initiative  
Testimony before the Committee on Government Reform – Subcommittee on Criminal  
Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources  
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Good Afternoon Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Waxman, Representative Cummings, and other honorable Members of the Government Reform Committee. My name is Félix Mata and I manage Baltimore’s Citywide Ex-offender Initiative within Mayor Martin O’Malley’s Office of Employment Development (MOED). I would like to thank you for the invitation to testify before you. I share your concern that recidivism is a very critical issue facing our nation and in particular our urban communities.

As you may know, over the last five (5) years we have witnessed a surge in the public’s interest to review current and create new reentry initiatives in the United States of America. Already along the east coast there are several ex-offender initiatives occurring. Besides the City of Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Chicago are a few areas where task forces aimed at addressing the issues of offender reentry are in place. However, this problem is not only limited to the larger urban populations, but smaller communities are facing a similar dilemma on what to do about those individuals returning from the justice system back into society. Just last year Savannah, Georgia began to look at reentry as part of their new Public Safety Task Force. In the Washington, DC corridor – Prince George’s, Montgomery, and Fairfax Counties have all started a reentry and/or gang task force to look at the problem of reentry or to prevent youth from entering the prison system. On the federal level, through efforts such as this, you and your colleagues authorized the Serious Violent Offender and Reentry Initiative (SVORI), which allocates up to \$2 million to states for building reentry programs. In addition, a Re-entry Policy Council, a collaboration of the U.S. Departments of Justice, Labor, and Health and Human Services, was created to further explore ways to successfully address the issue of reintegration.

With regards to the City of Baltimore, the situation is significant. For instance:

- ◆ Each year, over 9,000 people return to the City from Maryland’s prison facilities; with over 1,000 returning from federal prison facilities;
- ◆ Close to 20,000 individuals living in Baltimore are under mandatory supervision through the Division of Parole and Probation; and
- ◆ Over 60,000 individuals filter through the local detention center each year.

All of these individuals need employment in order to ensure their reentry to their community is positive and productive. But, in many instances, helping make this connection to the workplace goes beyond simply getting a job.

Our Mayor, Martin O’Malley and the Mayor’s Office of Employment Development facilitated the creation of Baltimore’s Citywide Ex-offender Task Force, in October 2002, to bring together diverse stakeholders to develop a citywide plan to assist ex-offenders in successfully transitioning back to the community.

With members representing more than 100 government agencies, nonprofit and community-based service providers, major foundations, advocacy groups and the faith-based community, the Task Force worked in committees including those addressing:

1. The needs and engagement of employers;
2. A survey of existing services to support the needs of the population;
3. The development of a model program or process for serving ex-offenders;
4. A review of relevant legislation;
5. A focus on the involvement of the faith community; and
6. An examination of transitional housing needs for ex-offenders.

Based on the work of its committees, which met for 18 months, the Task Force released the Baltimore Citywide Ex-offender Task Force Report and Recommendations in December 2003. This plan seeks to integrate, enhance and expand services for ex-offenders. The Task Force found that the average ex-offender returning to Baltimore is: African-American (90%), male (90%), is between the ages of 20 to 40 (with an average age of 33), and has little more than a sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) grade education.

A typical ex-inmate returning to Baltimore receives no more than \$40 upon release, with very little education and/or training, owes \$8,000 in child support, has no transportation, no medication to manage his mental illness, has no place to stay, and cannot find legitimate employment, but wants to turn his life around. As shared earlier, the needs of ex-offenders extend beyond receiving a job or participating in a training program. A myriad of services must be made available for this population. These include:

1. Housing assistance;
2. Physical and mental health aid;
3. Substance abuse treatment;
4. Child support modification support;
5. Access to identification;
6. Education and training; and
7. Employment opportunities.

In March 2004, the Mayor appointed The Baltimore Citywide Re-entry and Reintegration Steering Committee to carry out selected recommendations of the Task Force. Maryland State Delegate Salima Marriott and Maryland State Senator Nathaniel McFadden, both of who lead their respective statewide delegations for Baltimore City, currently co-chair the steering committee and provide a strong nexus between the City and State's work around these issues.

The last two years have seen some significant progress in reintegrating ex-offenders into Baltimore. One example is the collaborative project that we launched between the Mayor's Office of Employment Development and the Division of Parole and Probation, which placed one staff member in the City's Northwest One-Stop Career Center to connect ex-offenders to employment, training, and other services. The results of this collaboration have linked over 1,200 ex-offenders to services in the past year. Through Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation funding, an Ex-offender Change Agent was created for Baltimore's Eastside Career Center to work with ex-offenders in that community. Advocacy and legislative efforts have been supported for better opportunities for ex-offenders in Maryland including, increasing education and training programs behind the fence and an expansion of Baltimore's work release programs. The Steering Committee published an informational CD-Rom and resource guide for service providers and government agencies to inform their clients on what programs assist ex-offenders in Baltimore City. Lastly, encouraging more employers to hire ex-offenders has been the aim of the three Employer Appreciation Breakfasts sponsored by the Steering Committee and its partners. These breakfasts allows government agencies and the community to recognize businesses that hire ex-offenders and their exemplary staff. During the first breakfast in May 2003, approximately 150

guests were in attendance. Due to the tremendous success of this event, our December 2004 breakfast received over 300 guests with 36 businesses and over 100 business representatives in attendance. The event has received sponsorship by the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation.

Even though the City of Baltimore has done a tremendous amount of work to assist ex-offenders, much more is needed to properly assist this population. The City is currently looking at a new and bold approach of reentry by setting up a One-Stop Center where ex-offenders can receive all of the services they would need in becoming responsible citizens of our community. We are actively seeking funding from foundations, government agencies, and others to make this a reality. With the help of both the state and federal government Baltimore will be able to better assist this returning population.

Once again, I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify before you. I am happy to answer questions that you may have or address any concerns.